Some notes on writing and presenting a business plan

[Adapted from the book *Making Your Case*, by Antonin Scalia and Bryan A. Garner, Thomson/West, 2008.]

- **General comments**
  - Be sure that whatever you are asking of your audience is in the power of your audience to deliver. Know what you are asking for.
  - Know your audience.
  - Know your facts.
  - Play devil's advocate, or have someone do it for you as you prepare your business case. Think about how your business plan will be perceived by your audience.
  - Communicate clearly and concisely. Do not use fillers such as "like" and "um".
  - In your Executive Summary always start with a statement of the main issue(s) before fully stating the facts of your business plan. If your audience is going to pay attention to the numbers (such as financials or market research), they must really understand why they should. Don't show a long spreadsheet or a bunch of numbers and then explain why they were important!
  - Remember, words matter. You can often state the same thing from different perspectives. Be purposeful in choosing your perspective.
  - "Close powerfully." What is your call to action?!?
  - "Less is more!" Be concise and direct with your business plan. A fifty-page business plan is not necessarily twice as good as a twenty-five-page business plan.

- **When delivering an oral presentation of your business plan**
  - Arrive early, set everything up and make sure all technology is working properly.
  - Make a good first impression by dressing appropriately to your audience.
  - Even when you're not speaking, remember that you are onstage!
  - Make eye contact—this is a form of respect and confidence.
  - Have your opener down pat! Use your 90-second "elevator speech" if you have to.
  - Stop promptly when you are out of time. Never go over your allotted time.
  - If you have time left, but nothing further useful to say, conclude effectively and gracefully.
  - Never read word-for-word from a document. You might memorize a short pitch, but make sure it doesn't sound canned.
  - "Treasure simplicity." Do not use industry specific jargon or "tech talk". Everyone in your audience should understand what you are saying.
  - Rehearse your presentation in front of a mirror or record yourself on video. Work on indentifying your bad habits and mitigate them or eliminate them from your presentation. They can seriously distract the audience from your main message.
  - Welcome questions; if you don't know an answer to a question, say so and offer to get back to that person in the near future with an answer.
  - Listen carefully and, if necessary, ask for clarification.

- When you get a “yes – no question,” begin with a “yes” or a “no.” If your questioner ends up asking afterwards, “Was that a yes or a no?” you will look bad.
- Restate questions – sometimes changing the perspective of the question.

- **Additional comments**
  - If presenting as a team, be aware of how your team will be viewed. Do you work well together and is your delivery smooth and timely? Do all team members participate in the presentation or are they just standing with you showing support?
  - Think of the bigger picture. Why are you presenting? What is your goal? What is the best way to achieve your goal?
  - Is there a reason to have slides? Is there a reason for everything on your slides to be there?
  - How will your slides enhance and support your presentation?
  - If you put numbers on a slide, make it really easy for the audience to parse them quickly, and help the audience absorb the information.
  - Is the color scheme distracting, or is it helpful?
  - If you include video, consider the value added vs. the time. [A tradeoff always to be considered.]